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PROGRAM All Things Considered

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SUBJECT Daniel Schorr Comments on Efforts to Plug Leaks

MARGO ADLER: The FBI has formed a new unit to investigate leaks of sensitive government information to the news media. News analyst Daniel Schorr says that he finds disturbing symmetry in that news and the alleged spreading of disinformation by the National Security Agency.

DANIEL SCHORR: The FBI's four-man seekers-of-leakers team would have been known in Nixon times as the plumbers, but might today be more aptly labeled as the keister cops, referring to what President Reagan has said he is up to in leaks.

One of the unit's first reported assignments, not surprisingly, is the leak last June of a secret report of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, PFIAB to us insiders. The report excoriated the FBI and the CIA for mishandling the case of Edward Lee Howard, the discharged CIA agent who blew the agency's operations in Moscow, was fingered by defector Vitaly Yurchenko, escaped while under 24-hour FBI surveillance and defected to the Soviet Union.

What the keister cops are supposed to investigate is not how Howard got away, let alone why Yurchenko went away, but how word of the criticism got away.

One trouble the leak-seekers may run into is distinguishing between authorized and unauthorized leaks. In 1983 President Reagan ordered a full-scale FBI investigation, with polygraph tests, because of a leak that Robert McFarlane, then in Lebanon, had sent a cable recommending an air strike against Syrian positions endangering the American Marines. Three months later, the FBI concluded that the source of the information had been a White House briefing. And what's more, McFarlane told me

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